

THE GERMAN NOTE—A VICTORY FOR CIVILIZATION

By ISAAC DON LEVINE

GERMANY'S latest move is a victory for civilization. It opens the eyes of the short-sighted democracies of the world to the real mission of Prussianism. It makes all progressive humanity realize the full extent of the danger confronting it to-day.

The cloak of hypocrisy and deceit in which the Teuton up to the present has paraded before the neutral nations is now dropped for good. He has been forced to come out in the open and show his face, his weapon and his aims.

This is a victory for his opponents, for it is far easier to fight the ugly beast when he is exposed in his true light than when he is hidden under a misleading mask. It was with ill grace that the Prussian wore the mask of humanity forced upon him by outsiders. The label of law and right fastened to him by the United States did ill become the natural champion of savagery and piracy. Germany's newest act is really the logical sequence to and result of her career.

The near-sighted American diplomacy, far removed from the scene of Prussian activity, was unable to discern in time the real role of Germany among the democracies of Europe. One could perhaps understand why the American people, as a whole, did not realize the full meaning of Prussianism even after the outbreak of the war, when one recalls that for forty years the democracies of Europe themselves failed to identify the wolf in their very midst.

France, the nation within a moment's reach of the beast's claws, was the nest of anti-militarism in Europe on the eve of the war. Great Britain, the mother of democracy, dreamed of disarmament, jeered at armaments and was unprepared when the Prussian struck Europe. Russian democracy, which is now prosecuting the war for Russia, was the most pacifist public body on earth. Is there any wonder, then, that the United States, thousands of miles away, could not be persuaded into believing, even after Germany's treatment of Belgium, that a dark medieval power—Prussianism—had come into the world to destroy the very foundations of civilization and of this Republic's institutions and ideals?

Let not intelligent Americans deceive themselves and claim that the great American people comprehend the issues at stake in the great war. The vast majority of the American nation, whose true representative is President Wilson, have utterly failed to comprehend them. President Wilson, the true servant of his people, has acted accordingly during the last thirty months.

Welcomed Wolf to the Fold

And with his acts the President has inscribed into the history of mankind the strongest condemnation of present-day democracy. He has befriended the outcast of the human race, the foe of democracy,

the power whose very existence is devoted to the extermination of civilization. He has, in the name of the American people, who empowered him to do so, patted the Prussian fiend on his back, labelled him as the friend and champion of justice and right, lulled him into a temporary calm with sweet words and assurances.

But the Prussian demon would not turn into an angel. The wolf cannot go on forever playing the rôle of the lamb. Besides, this rôle proved of no value to the beast. Fortunately, the Allies were not deceived by the German tricks. It was only the neutral world, especially America, that took them with any degree of seriousness at all. And Prussianism, in its true form, has now come out to make its last and most desperate attempt to achieve its original objects and purposes.

The American people are finally to be disillusioned of their conception of Germany. And with disillusionment there will come a fuller realization of the tremendously vital issues at stake in the world struggle. The United States will soon perceive that its neutrality up to the present was a disgrace to the principles on which this Republic was founded. For no wider, deeper and more clear-cut difference has ever developed in the history of humanity than the one existing between the ideals and interests of America and Germany.

Germany's latest step is therefore a distinct gain to the cause of democracy and civilization because it discloses in an unmistakable manner to the American people the real character of the struggle now going on in Europe. The series of perfidious and brutal deeds committed by Germany since the beginning of the war will now appear in their true light. And America will finally recognize the absolute incompatibility in this world of Prussianism and democracy.

America stands for democracy, civilization and right. Her joining the ranks of Germany's opponents would mean more than the physical addition of a member to the Allies. It would mean more than the possible shortening of the war and the saving of many human lives. It would mean, above all, the creation of a basis for the future security of mankind from war.

Whether it be a League to Enforce Peace or some other combination of powers, it is practically agreed among the world's statesmen that some kind of federation of nations will dominate the world after the conclusion of peace. This federation will guarantee permanent peace on earth. America's joining the Allies would create the nucleus for such a federation.

To-day the world is divided into three distinct sections—the Allies, the Central Powers and the neutral nations. While the Allies are admittedly the strongest of the three forces, it is doubtful if they could withstand the combined pressure of the other two sections. But Germany's move will now isolate the Central Powers completely.

Once the United States joins the Allies

Prussianism Sheds Its Cloak of Hypocrisy and Bares to the World Its Aims, Thereby Laying Itself Open to Extermination—What the United States Has in Its Power to Accomplish

the probability is that South America and Spain will follow suit. The New and the Old Worlds would thus be welded together. The remaining neutrals would be of no consequence. The Allies, having become a tremendous combination, would practically constitute the League to Enforce Peace. Germany's punishment would, of course, become a certainty.

America's joining the Allies would also mean a closer union with Japan, which is a member of the same alliance. The two would participate in the same Peace Conference which will settle the world's troublesome problems. The same holds true of America's relations with Russia. They would become much more intimate and would undoubtedly lead to the conclusion of a new treaty on bases favorable to the United States.

There is another important factor in connection with this country's rôle as a member of the Allies. America's membership would guarantee a just solution of Europe's many painful questions. The principle of nationality would find in America its heartiest supporter. The oppressed races and peoples would particularly welcome America's participation in the Peace Conference.

The Jews, Armenians, Poles, Irish, Czechs and other nationalities would find in the United States their best and most powerful champion. The various elements making up America's national body would with justice demand of this nation that it take a determined stand in reference to the vexing problems of Europe's minor nations. And there can be no doubt that America would use all its influence in favor of a radical but wholesome reconstruction of the world's future political and even economic life.

World Domination Prussian Aim

To understand fully the character of the war it is well for America, at this turning point in human history, to go back to the origin of the titanic conflict. Prussia aimed at world domination. This aim was to be achieved through an alliance of the "three Emperors," German, Austrian and Russian. Germany controlled Austria politically. Germany's influence in Russia was at one time so powerful as to bring Prussia's designs near to realization.

For Russia and Germany, as far as the ruling classes were concerned, have been closely affiliated for generations. Historically and politically the governments of the two nations had much in common. The Russian Czar, according to the findings of one historian, has in his veins only a small fraction of Slav blood, as compared with

German. His present wife is German. Most of his family are married to German princes and princesses. The functionaries and counsellors at the court are largely men and women of German extraction. The bureaucracy is full of men and women of German origin or German sympathies. The whole governmental machine was before the war permeated with, if not dominated by, Prussianism. Among all the great powers of Europe official Germany came nearest to official Russia in spirit. This fact alone would have sufficed to create a bond of mutual affection between Russia and Germany.

But besides the historical and political bonds that existed between the two powers, there came into existence in recent years a new bond, the economic bond. Germany had made gigantic strides in the field of industrial progress. Germany was successfully competing with Great Britain in the realm of international commerce. Great Britain had her vast colonial possessions from which to draw raw materials. Germany has found in Russia a substitute for that delinquency in her system. So Germany invaded Russia economically. She monopolized Russian trade legally and illegally. Her commerce with Russia surpassed that of all other nations combined.

Germany had the advantage also of territorial proximity. She drew on Russia's vast timber wealth, which was floated down directly into Germany from the Pripiet forest belt along a system of rivers. Germany got this timber at ridiculously low prices. She drew on Russia's breadstuffs, cattle reserves, in constantly increasing quantities. She paid for all raw materials bought in Russia much lower prices than her competitors paid for the same materials bought in Russia or elsewhere. She therefore could afford to compete with France and Great Britain. The competition was at the expense of enslaved Russia.

Secret of Germany's Power

The secret of Germany's power and triumphs in the West is to be found in her dealings with the East. Germany had thus cemented her old political influence on Russia with a newer economic domination. Political and commercial Germany were working hand in hand for the attainment of the Hohenzollern ambitions of conquest and world domination.

But, if Germany and Russia were so closely bonded, how did it come to pass that the two should fight each other? If Russia's ruling classes were friendly to Germany, how did they come to be engaged

in a war against Germany? The answer to these questions is based chiefly on an economic factor.

This economic factor was a result of the mentioned economic invasion of Russia by Germany. Germany failed to make this invasion complete. While she captured more than half of Russia's trade, she failed to pour capital, to make investments, in Russia. She failed to do so because she had no idle capital.

Germany's commercial and industrial development was in full swing and had not reached yet its apogee. She needed all the capital she could accumulate for further military and industrial expansion. All her financial surpluses went into her enterprises along these lines. And there were none to spare. Germany had not yet had time to become a money-lending nation like France or Great Britain.

In this respect her position was similar to that of the United States before the outbreak of the war. While she could send her commercial agents to wind around the globe the nets of her commerce, Germany could not send abroad her investors to build factories, construct railroads, or lend money to foreign governments from purely business points of view. Whenever such cases occurred they were on a small scale and promoted by the German government for diplomatic or strategic reasons. Germany was therefore compelled to suffer the entrance of French, British and Belgian capital into the economic arena of Russia.

What this entrance meant in its ultimate effects is now illustrated by the war. It meant the destruction of Germany's plans for world conquest based on the alliance of the "three Emperors." It meant closer relations between Russia and France and Great Britain.

French Break Germany's Grip

France had seven billion dollars invested in Russia at the outbreak of the war. Belgium and Great Britain probably had a like amount sunk in Russian investments. For more than a decade France supplied the Russian government with funds to cover her chronic deficits. For more than a quarter of a century Belgium and England have been financing Russian municipalities in their instalment of modern sewer, transportation, light, telephone and other systems.

Hundreds of millions were sunk in Siberian and Ural mines, in Caucasian oil fields. Steamship lines and factories were built on foreign capital. The charge has been made against the investors that they were but instruments in the hands of their respective governments in the promotion of their political designs.

But the fact is that France, Belgium and Great Britain invested in Russia originally and primarily because it paid. It was

business, pure and simple. To this the scale of the investments made testifies. No government encouragements or urgings could induce capital to invest in a country such vast sums as France and Great Britain have invested in Russia. It was only when Germany's growing military organization became a distinct menace, when Germany's ruling caste grew aggressive and insolent, that republican France began encouraging loans to autocratic Russia, in order to win the friendship of that nation and alienate her from the Teutons.

For a time France had incurred the enmity of the Russian people for this. But to France it was a life measure, a case of self-protection, of safety first. French capital has thus created a gulf between Russia and Germany, a gulf considerably widened by French diplomacy. It is French, Belgian and British capital invested in Russia that constitutes the economic factor responsible for the severance of the bonds which existed between Germany and Russia.

The real origin of the war is thus revealed through a review of the Germano-Russian relations. Germany saw her grip on Russia menaced from two sides, economic and political. And the retention of this grip was essential to her industrial as well as political greatness. Germany dreamed of an alliance of the "three Emperors," Russian, Austrian and German. Such an alliance could dominate the world. And who but Germany would dominate the alliance?

And Germany was indeed very near to the realization of such a rôle. She had Austria under her complete control. She enslaved Russia economically and dominated her politically. But, through the interference of French and other capital and Russia's national aspirations in the Balkans, Germany suddenly found herself facing the probability of letting Russia slip from her grip. The solution presented itself in a sudden and effective blow at Russia. Great Britain would stay neutral. France would be crushed in a few weeks. Then Russia will be cowed into submission. Her sentimental Slavism will be killed: She will no longer indulge in dreaming of the Dardanelles.

Humbled again, ten years after the disgraceful defeats at the hands of Japan, Russia will conclude a peace that will extend Germany's hold on her.

Junkerism Expected Brief War

That such was the origin of the war is also the view of the German Socialist minority expressed in a manifesto suppressed by the government. "Prussian Junkerism," says the manifesto, "expected a joyous and gay war of six months at the most; and for reward the elimination of France from the ranks of the great powers and an entente with Russia for a common imperialistic policy; an alliance of the three Emperors for the domination of the world." Russia, through her Germanophile bureaucracy and nobility, was to become an agency in the hands of Germany in the realization of her audacious plan: a world dominated and ruled by the chosen race—the Teutons.

But Germany's plans miscarried. Great Britain entered the conflict in time, realizing early the ominous significance of

Prussia's declaration of war. And then Russia did not act as Germany expected her to do. It is true, Germany succeeded in administering to Russia a severe beating. The staggering blow of 1915 in Poland was sufficient to overthrow completely any other nation but Russia. The expected military collapse did not come.

Germany, however, strained all her efforts and energies to bring about a separate peace between Russia and the Central Powers through underground activity and influence. The Prussian agents in Russian high spheres were put to work in the Czar's court. There were times when they were almost successful in their mission. When the full history of the war comes to be written humanity will be told how dangerously near and imminent seemed at times a separate peace between Russia and the Teutons.

The power that prevented the disaster was the Russian democracy. This factor was never considered by the Prussians. But the Russian people's service to the cause of civilization is hardly realized throughout the world. For it was their loyalty to the Allies, their trust in the cause of the Allies, their hopes for a better Russia through the Allies' victory, that made the Russian people stand up as one man for the fullest prosecution of the war.

When Germany discovered, a short time ago, that her machinations in Russia have been blocked by a tremendous new force, she turned to the West. Her agents and propagandists began to tell the world that Russia was no European nation, that her proper place was in Asia, that the future savior of the world is to be a combination of Germany, Great Britain and the United States.

This was intended for Great Britain. Germany did not succeed in tearing Russia away from the Allies. She tried next to separate Great Britain from them. But the result was the same. The ranks of the Allies were found to be solid and united.

The Final Peace Manoeuvre

Then came Germany's last peace manoeuvre. For that was all her peace proposal amounted to. It never was intended as a serious move. For we now see that while Germany was talking peace to a credulous neutral world she was elaborating her plans for ruthless sea warfare.

Germany's proposed peace was to be such as to allow her to save her skin and to prepare for a second and more successful thrust at democracy and civilization. But the Allies would not be deceived. They understood her objects but too well, and remained adamant and determined. And then Germany chose the path that was hers, that was in keeping with her career of frightfulness and inhumanity.

There seems nothing left for this nation and the other neutrals to do but to join the Allies in their heroic combat against Prussianism. The issue in this struggle stands now, more than ever before, in all its clearness and distinctness. It is an issue upon which the future of humanity hinges. No more vital and profound issue has been raised in human history for centuries. Democracy and autocracy, civilization and barbarism, right and might are the two mortally opposed forces in this struggle.

A NIGHT IN A MUCH BOMBARDED FRENCH CITY

M. René Benjamin, the laureate of the French poets and the master interpreter of the spirit which the war has created in France, paid a visit recently to a French city on the firing line, which is subjected to intermittent bombardment by the German, not for military reasons, but only from motives of malice and wanton destructiveness. It is evidently Rheims, although M. Benjamin does not say so.

His experiences overnight there are narrated in his characteristically vivid style. M. Benjamin is both a poet and a humorist. Yet he is also a realist. He is at his best in emphasizing the incongruities—the curious mingling of tragedy and comedy—of such a vigil as the one he was forced to take part in in the cellar of a Rheims hotel.

When one gets away from Paris, there is no doubt about it, he feels like a different being, whether he is travelling toward some tranquil province which has never heard the thunder of the cannon or is taking a train toward the zone of war. At the Eastern railroad station all those sombre soldiers, returning to the front, are a living advertisement to the misery of the time. The voyage, instead of being quick, becomes all at once agonizingly slow, among these men who sleep in order to forget.

One is under way scarcely an hour when one gets into a country which shows evidence of the cruellest souvenirs. Those struts pushed their advance this far, and the soil holds so many dead! The stations are filled with all the impediments which weigh down armies. The traveller, rubbing the frost from the window pane with his glove, sees armed men everywhere through the country—a country of

winter, in its setting of dull gray. The night falls. It makes the eyelids leaden and fills the heart with gloom. One rolls on, his soul perturbed and anxious, toward the scene of war.

Merely to name the name of the city to which I go calls up to the spirit a noble though melancholy image. A city strong and beautiful, an honor to France, which the enemy, without taking the slightest risk, bombards from a distance—vandal as well as coward.

The War Is Far Away

But when I arrive the night is so calm, so serene, so transparently clear, the moon half full, the heavens studded with stars, that I breathe the pure, fresh air contentedly and confidently. After many days shrouded in fog, winter thus recompenses us with certain invigorating, radiant nights, which cheer us and refresh our strength. I reach the hotel, walking with a firm step, and say to myself: "Well, after all, the war is pretty far away."

I remark to the porter, "Things are not bad here."

He snuffles, more sulky than frightened in manner:

"Yes. We can celebrate now. But by and there will be more shells."

"You don't mean it?"

Then, assuming that detached and tragic air of the common people when they tell you something startling, he narrates what has happened in a manner that would have made me smile, if, at the idea of those shells wrecking whole houses, all my sensibilities had not stood on edge.

"But," he concluded, "Monsieur has arrived after all is over."

"Is the hotel full?" I ask.

"Yes, and there are many fine people.

To the right of you here is a colonel."

Then he leaves me in a chamber which seems cold and empty. Once under my bed covers, I gaze at the walls, the ceiling, everywhere, and this idea comes to me very distinctly: "A shell smashing the hotel would pulverize me very neatly and completely."

Finally this fixed idea wears me and I fall asleep.

In heaven's name! I find myself in a sitting posture, raised erect in my bed by a frightful detonation.

"It is they—the Boches," I pant.

But I am alive and in a room which is still intact. Not knowing what to do, perhaps out of cowardice, I hide myself under the covers, when a ringing in my ear makes me jump out of bed. It is the telephone. At the same time it rings in the adjoining room, and I hear the colonel, who growls in peevish voice:

"Hello! Hello! Who is it?"

Bells in a Panic

I haven't time to laugh. All the bells in the house ring in chorus. It is an electric panic—a call sent out by the proprietor, who, in giving the alarm, pushes all the buttons he can get his fingers on. So, in each chamber, there is literally a réveil.

Before the elevator entrance the proprietor, very pale, makes a gesture with his hand.

"There, there—the cellar! Go down quickly!"

The civilians, frightened and obedient, crush against one another without shame, and their feet clattering down the stone steps of the subterranean staircase sound like the tumbling and roaring of a cascade.

When we find ourselves among the casks and the coal sacks the proprietor says, showing the arch over our heads:

"There is nothing to fear. It is forty centimetres thick."

His guests recover their breath. And, among the bottles, they resume, in this protective atmosphere, their attitude, suddenly become comic, of educated people of the world.

"Pardon, Madame." "Excuse me, Monsieur."

The women, surprised in the disorder of the night, lower their eyes, as if that would prevent the men from remarking that the most of them are very mediocre and unattractive without ornaments or make-up.

A gentleman with dignified whiskers trembles with the cold in his tight-fitting pajamas. And an old man with a catarrh, his naked feet thrust into slippers, mutters:

"Too bad! Too bad! Do you still hear them?"

Then a representative of the wine trade speaks up.

The Wine Man Speaks

"Do you still hear them? You will hear them all right. They will begin again. The wine! I represent the wine trade, Monsieur, and I don't propose to be shot at like a rabbit. No, no; I shall not go upstairs again. (An officer who is present smiles.) And I don't care what any one thinks about it."

"Monsieur," said a stout fellow, who wore an otter cap, approaching the wine salesman, "I agree with you, and I clasp your hand. I represent biscuits."

"And—how much does each dis-

charge like that cost?" asked the old man with the catarrh.

All these people, who are thus hiding under the earth and are in deadly fear of being buried there forever, as soon as the first danger passes recover their voices and give expression to all their poor, vulgar and commonplace ideas, now comic because they are so out of place. And we remain thus for two hours or more, impatiently listening, gazing at one another, sighing, talking melancholy stupidities.

Finally the proprietor declares, with all the authoritative air of a doctor of divinity:

"The Boches have gone to bed. Let us go upstairs."

This one-man decision suffices. We all obey. We climb up from the cellar. We go back to bed. Some of us fall asleep.

Two o'clock. I leap from my couch. In the street the steam siren is blowing—the siren of which they have told me at great length, and whose notes some have already heard. This lamentable siren fills the air, makes the window panes rattle, overwhelms the ear. It has a sinister monotonousness, like the wind which howls, and it seems to me all of a sudden as if all the surrounding country were warning the great city with a plaintive cry, for over the surrounding country the shell has already passed. Here it comes now. I divine it and draw in my shoulders. But even before I can strike a light there is a frightful explosion, sharp, splitting, metallic, with a burst of flame which blinds me, and a falling of a thousand fragments on the roof of the hotel.

With a bound I am in the corridor. All

the guests rush out, dash, push, crash against one another, hurry downstairs and hide. When we are again in the cellar we look at one another. All is the same as before. A woman runs in from outside, dishevelled, crying:

"All the window panes of the pastry shop at the corner have been smashed."

Then the representative of the wine trade, furious, his arms crossed, makes this remark:

"Ah! Ah! They are in luck, these pastry people."

"It is terrible," says the old man with the catarrh. "Why this foolish destruction? Well, it must cost them a good deal for each cannon charge."

"Twenty-five thousand francs."

"The cost—I don't care about the cost," said the man of wines. "But this time they'll not have another chance at me. I shall not go upstairs again under any circumstances. You can tell me anything you like!"

His threatening eye was fixed on the proprietor, of whom the man with the catarrh was asking:

"Are they going to begin all over again?"

The stupid and foolish in man resumes its sway. The dignified gentleman with whiskers trembles. The women are ugly. I have a sense of bitterness. Two lovers, looking scared and ill at ease, hold each other's hands, propped against a barrel. As for myself, I sit down on a bag of coal, snapping my fingers both at men and things, and try to get a little sleep.

Out of the Cellar

What a long and stupid night we pass in the cellar! We go upstairs about 7

o'clock, rumbled up, stiff, shivering, when the daylight creeping in through the air-holes makes our fears and hesitations vanish. The daylight—it is the best thing men have. It is the real reason of their courage. The day gives them confidence; it increases their manhood.

But we are scarcely up the staircase when a chambermaid cries:

"Listen! Yes! It is the tocsin."

"Hello! Something else! Bombs from aeroplanes!"

This girl, giving the alarm, clings to the wall, her mouth wide open. And at that moment the colonel, my neighbor upstairs, the man whom I heard at the telephone, whom we have not seen in the cellar, descends the stairs slowly and says, in a tranquil voice:

"Mademoiselle, will you please go up and look for my valise?"

She, terrified and stammering, answers:

"Yes, yes, Monsieur."

And she begins to mount the stairs, staggering and choking. The colonel rubs his hands. He says to the proprietor:

"A nice little morning, is it not?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, Colonel. But have you heard the bombardment?"

"There it is," answered the colonel. "That's my music."

The proprietor whispers to me:

"He is insensible—as insensible as a carpet. It is frightful!"

Frightful, but inspiring. For on all of us, who were just going to descend again into the cellar, he suddenly imposes his self-control. He gives us back our strength and dignity—this unconscious and admirable man.